

MORE PAGES FROM A WORKER'S LIFE

by

William Z. Foster

Edited, and with

an Introduction

by

ARTHUR ZIPSER



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MORE PAGES FROM A WORKER'S LIFE

Introduction

William Z. Foster was the Communist candidate for president of the United States in 1932, as he had been in 1924 and 1928.

Foster was 51 years old when the campaign started. Experience had already taught that Communist candidates faced a workload beyond that carried by those of major political parties. Foster has listed some of the realities of the candidate's task: "incessant traveling, perpetual speechmaking, bad food, miserable hotels, boresome newspaper interviews, being talked half to death or kept from badly needed sleep by comrades who felt it to be the function of a Presidential candidate to adjust every local grievance, by after-meeting home gatherings, 'banquets' and untimely talkfests." 1

When the campaign started in June Foster had just behind him a five-months' coal miners strike. He was obviously in need of a rest. Instead he started off on a speaking tour designed to cover thirty thousand miles (all by ground transportation) and include 105 major speeches and numerous radio talks. Local conferences, demonstrations at railroad stops, and the special ordeal of "banquets" were other major items in the plan of work.

On the first day of this challenging grind he experienced heart symptoms which should have signaled the wisdom of calling the whole thing off. These were the harbingers of an ailment of which he was never to be totally free for the rest of his life. But Foster found it unbelievable that he, who had never been seriously ill before, should now be having the warning signs of a heart ailment. He chose to ignore the signs - even though there were times when he had to cling to the speaker's stand to keep himself erect.

His expectation that his normal and familiar rugged good health would carry him through fell short of the actuality by 10,000 miles and twenty-eight major

speeches. On September 8 he collapsed at Moline, Illinois. "The pitcher," as he has said, "had gone once too often to the well." ²

It was a heart attack and resulted in a total breakdown. Three years were to pass before he was able to make a ten-minute speech.

Bill Foster attributed his eventual substantial recovery to three factors: "the intelligent, tireless and loving care of my devoted wife, the loyal assistance given me by the Party, and my own determination...to live on and fight in the workers' struggle for emancipation." ³

Whether the role of his doctors in the success of his campaign to recover his health is omitted in the above statement by oversight or by design cannot be determined at this late date. When he wrote these words (probably in 1937) he certainly showed no sense of impending doom and, indeed, no doom impended. But (as, with wry amusement, he recalled to the present writer in 1955) a doctor had said to him in 1935, "Don't worry, Bill. You can live another five years." Foster died in 1961, in his 81st year.

But, never again, after his 1932 illness, was he able to resume the reckless schedule of his earlier years. Eventually, in his characteristic fashion, he organized himself, and his productivity up to the end of his life was phenomenal. But a greater portion of his time than before was now spent in writing. There were to be no more whistlestop campaigns. In 1932 he had been in the field during a five-months-long coal strike and written a book at the same time. In the last twenty-five years of his life his activity slacked off from the phenomenal to the merely extraordinary.

Only one unforeseen and unforeseeable episode interrupted Foster's long, orderly march back to relatively good health. A roadblock was encountered when a visit to San Francisco, intended as a change of scene for the purpose of rest and recuperation, ran smack into the San Francisco General Strike.

The San Francisco General Strike (July 16-19, 1934) was a demonstration of workingclass power unprecedented in U.S. labor history. It is necessary only to understand the importance of this event - and to understand Bill Foster - to appreciate why the excitement of the occasion made his "shattered nerves...about ready to explode." After the strike had been on for a couple of days, he says, he "was virtually in a state of collapse from excitement and my inability to give any real help.... And to make the hazard more acute, William Green [president of the AFL], like a faithful capitalist henchman, had condemned the general walkout and declared that 'Foster is the man behind the strike.' So, in the midst of the struggle, I had to be withdrawn to a less exposed position in the nearby country."

Foster's enormous, but carefully husbanded, energies produced - between 1935 and 1939 - two books and a library of pamphlets. (The latter dealt mainly with the organizational questions pertaining to the new wave of late '30s unionism).

Both books were autobiographical. First came From Bryan to Stalin (1937); then came Pages from a Worker's Life (1939), a collection of anecdotes from a life of labor and politics.

Pages was written principally in 1937. Though by this time Foster was back in his groove as a Party functionary, he still had to adhere to a limiting physical schedule. His writing, however, he seemed to consider no labor at all, but as natural as breathing. While not exactly a therapeutic exercise, it became a substantial part of his work from 1936 on, reaching a peak in the first half of the 1950s.

International Publishers, headed by its redoubtable founder Alexander ("Trachty") Trachtenberg, brought out Pages from a Worker's Life with its 117 brief items in 1939. (It is still in print in cloth and paperbound editions.) The author had submitted some 150 items to the publisher of which about three dozen were omitted from the book, principally to meet space limitations.

This "overmatter" remained in manuscript form in the possession of a member of William Z. Foster's immediate family after his death. It was subsequently turned over to the veteran labor reporter Art Shields. In 1974 and 1975 five of these additional Pages appeared in World Magazine, a weekly supplement of the Daily World and the People's World.⁵ We have selected some two dozen of the hitherto unpublished Pages for presentation here, and we hope we have picked those of the most enduring interest. Those few words which appear in square brackets were supplied by the editor, as were the reference notes. It is probably unnecessary to remind the reader that some of the terminology and political observations employed by Foster in the following Pages reflect peculiarly the period in which they were written.

Our thanks go to Art Shields for making Foster's manuscript available to us at this time and to Louis Diskin, president of International Publishers, Inc., for encouraging the publication of what is essentially an addendum to a work which is still on that firm's list.

MORE PAGES FROM A WORKER'S LIFE

I. People

TOM MOONEY

The first time I met Tom Mooney⁶ was under rather peculiar and embarrassing circumstances. It took place in Chicago in 1913. I was national secretary of the Syndicalist League of North America. Mooney, already a well-known revolutionary worker of San Francisco, was a member of our organization, but I had never met him personally. However, Tom was elected a delegate from his local union to the Molders' convention in Milwaukee and, on his way there, stopped over at Chicago to visit me. We both later went on to Milwaukee, where we worked together at forming a Syndicalist group inside the Molders' union.

I lived at the rooming house conducted by Lucy Parsons, widow of Albert R. Parsons, one of the Haymarket martyrs. The night Mooney arrived at our place it happened that we had a bit of a gathering there. Present were several S.L. of N.A. members and half a dozen Wobblies from various cities, delegates to the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) convention which was then being held in Chicago.

All of us were much impressed with the personality of Tom Mooney. In those days he was a fine, handsome, powerful, upstanding figure, full of spirit and vitality. He already had a growing reputation as a militant fighter. But little did we dream of the tragic fate that was in store for him.

We had a pleasant evening together and, as always among revolutionaries, our talk centered around the problems of the labor movement. The main subject of our discussion was the question of boring-from-within the trade unions. Mooney and the rest of us S.L. of N.A. members strongly favored the policy of working inside the conservative labor organizations, while the Wobblies all aggressively defended the traditional left wing policy of dual unionism.

We had had several hours of discussion and all the I.W.W.'s and nearly all of the S.L. of N.A. members had gone home, when suddenly Lucy Parsons broke in upon us with very disconcerting news. Her watch had disappeared, a beautiful gold watch given to her by her husband on the eve of his execution. She said

it was simply nowhere to be found in the apartment.. Lucy, naturally enough, was heartbroken over the loss of her precious keepsake.

What had become of the watch? Tom and the rest of us puzzled over the matter. It was impossible to believe that anybody present that evening had stolen it. Nevertheless the watch was gone, utterly vanished, nor could all our search of the premises dig up the invaluable heirloom. Unpleasant though the task was, there was nothing to do but to check up on all who had been at our gathering and this unpleasant job was done. I took the matter up with the S.L. of N.A. members and Lucy Parsons went to the I.W.W. delegates. We told them of the great sentimental value of the watch and begged its return at all costs if anyone had taken it. But nobody admitted knowing anything of the timepiece.

Two or three days passed, the watch remained unfound and Lucy was grief-stricken. But one day she came to the S.L. of N.A. rooms, which adjoined her place, all radiant and happy, the watch in her hand. It seems that that morning, on going to the wood-box on the outdoor porch (the flat being stove-heated), she had lifted up a stick of kindling wood and there, under it, was lying Albert R. Parsons' gold watch, quite unharmed.

We were all overjoyed at the happy outcome. But the whole business became still more inexplicable, for the strange circumstance of the watch's finding was added to the mystery of its disappearance. Had the watch simply been mislaid by Lucy herself, or had somebody stolen it, not knowing its significance, and then returned it upon our pleading? We never learned the answer.

Years later, as Tom Mooney, brutally framed up by California capitalists to cripple his militant activities, was developing his long and heroic battle for justification and liberty, I often visited him in San Quentin penitentiary. And more than once we smiled over the mysterious disappearance and return of Lucy Parsons' famous watch and wondered how the whole thing had happened.⁷

MOTHER JONES

Mother Mary Jones, who died a few years ago [1930] at the extreme old age of 100, was one of the most remarkable figures of her time in the American trade union movement. For two full generations she could always be found militantly awakening the workers in the current big strikes. She was on the payroll of the United Mine Workers, but she exercised a sort of roving commission and was sure to turn up in every great A.F. of L. strike, no matter in what industry it occurred. She probably participated actively in more important strikes than any other labor leader of her time.

Mother Jones, a miner's widow, was a born working class agitator. Although she lacked the burning eloquence of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, outstanding old-time I.W.W. leader, and did not possess the fine organizing ability of the martyred Fannie Sellins⁸, she nevertheless commanded a fiery militancy and homely oratory that were highly stimulating to strikers facing terrorism and starvation. Her prestige was enormous among the miners and the many other groups of workers with whom she did strike service.

Generally, Mother Jones is to be listed in the progressive wing of the labor movement. Once she belonged to the Socialist Party, and she participated in the founding convention of the I.W.W. But she did not have the revolutionary understanding of Mother Bloor, the remarkable present-day Communist leader who at the age of 75⁹ is still an active militant. In consequence she made many grotesque political mistakes. In one breath she would be actively endorsing the Soviet government and snorting fire and brimstone against the capitalist system, and in the next breath she was naively appealing to the "better side" of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to improve his workers' conditions, or openly supporting the reactionary Harding for President. Notwithstanding her vagaries, however, she was a proletarian rebel at heart, and every strike-bound employer dreaded her presence among his striking workers.

One of Mother Jones' most outstanding characteristics was her tremendous vitality. She kept up her active work as a speaker and strike leader almost to the very year she died.

When the big steel organizing campaign of 1919 got well under way no one was surprised when Mother Jones, smelling a great strike brewing, appeared on the scene to help. Although she was 89 years old at the time, she insisted on becoming one of the regular staff of organizers and facing all the work and danger that the others did. It never occurred to her (or to any of the rest of us, for that matter) that her four score and nine years might be any sort of handicap.

But our committee had to use Mother Jones' services judiciously. The situation in the steel industry was very touchy; we were orienting upon the perspective of a national movement and we could not afford to have local strikes break out, and such strikes could easily happen after a visit to town of the fiery Mother Jones. So we usually sent her to places where our organizing work was only beginning and the danger of a premature strike was negligible. One such place was Duquesne, Pa., where she and several others were arrested for holding an open air meeting in defiance of the city Burgess, the notorious steel trust gunman, James R. Crawford, who had declared that not even Jesus Christ could speak in his town for the A.F. of L.

Once however, despite all our precautions, Mother Jones put one over on us and nearly spilled the beans. It was in Homestead, Pa., a steel-company controlled city. The authorities had refused to allow the A.F. of L. steel committee to hold meetings, either in halls or in the open, and we were following a policy of calling street meetings in the center of the city in defiance of this prohibition. For a couple of weeks we had been holding these meetings, and they were so heavily attended by steel workers that the city authorities did not deem it advisable to molest them.

On the night in question, however, thinking that all was calm, we sent Mother Jones as the principal speaker and the Burgess of Homestead got the bright idea of arresting her. So the police took her into custody and started off to the city jail. At once they found they had a hornet's nest on their hands. The big throng of steel workers followed after them, yelling and hooting indignantly. As the tumultuous procession passed along the main street, the movie houses emptied themselves of people, and steel workers came running from all directions to join the rapidly increasing mass. By the time the

police reached the station-house with Mother Jones, the dense crowd numbered many thousands.

The incensed steel workers demanded the instant release of Mother Jones. Shouts arose to break into the jail and free her by force. The police were in a panic. They realized that the great crowd outside, oppressed for years by the steel barons, were now actually in control of the city. And they were filled with deadly fear of the workers they had so long persecuted. Frantically, they wired for state troopers, but these could not reach Homestead for an hour, and the city authorities' burning need was a matter of minutes.

So the police speedily turned Mother Jones loose, and she went out on the street and delivered an hour's speech on unionism to the great throng of steel workers gathered before the police headquarters. All went off peaceably. The upheaval did not spread to the mills, where it might easily have caused a hopeless and costly local strike. The crowd had dispersed by the time the murderous state troopers came roaring into Homestead to recapture the city from the aroused steel workers.

A stirring night, indeed, for boss-ridden Homestead. But it was just another day in the life of that stormy petrel of the class struggle, Mother Jones.

TOM MANN

One of the most prominent and inspiring figures in the whole international revolutionary movement is Tom Mann, a leader in the Communist Party of Great Britain. Now in his eighties¹⁰, Mann has been a prominent militant in the class struggle for some 60 years, and he is still as active as many men 25 years his junior.

Every great struggle of the British working class for the past two generations has found Tom Mann in the front line. He first came to fame in the celebrated London Dockers' strike of 1889; he was also an outstanding leader of the historic national strikes of miners, railwaymen and transport workers in 1912. He played a prominent role in the anti-war struggle of 1914-18 and was an active figure in the British national general strike of 1926, not to speak of scores of other important struggles throughout the years.

Tom Mann is one of the finest mass educators and agitators ever produced by the working class of Great Britain or any other country. With a marvelous personal vitality and magnetism, a sparkling enthusiasm and wit, and a splendid speaking voice and manner, Mann was a powerful platform figure all his mature life.

British trade union leaders have long been noted for their stodginess, ultra-respectability and lack of progressive and revolutionary understanding and fighting spirit. This is a reflection of the fact that the upper layers of the British working class, the skilled workers, over a long period were heavily "bourgeoisified" by British imperialism through its policy of petty concessions and reform.

But Tom Mann, like a freed eagle, has soared magnificently all his life above this petty labor servility to the imperialists. He has always known and fought the capitalists as the enemies of the workers. Although he himself was a skilled machinist and long a leading trade union official, the English capitalist class was totally unable to fasten its lackey livery on him, as it did upon so many other workers' leaders. Mann has always been an incorruptible revolutionist, a symbol of all that is best, progressive and most rebellious in the working class. He has been one of the strongest and truest voices of the great British proletariat, which is revolutionary at heart, despite the heavy fetters of class collaboration and petty bourgeois ideology that have been fastened upon it by the employers and their labor leader allies.

Throughout his work in the labor movement Tom Mann has been a labor pioneer. It was during his first tour to the United States in 1913 (which I organized) that I got personally acquainted with him. He was one of the pioneers of the British Socialist movement and in the building of the Labor Party. He was a valiant fighter for the "new" industrial unionism; and when the Communist movement assumed world proportions with the success of the Russian revolution and the breakdown of the Socialist International, Mann promptly took his place in this new front line of the world revolution.

Besides his political and trade union activities in Great Britain, Tom Mann, with limitless energy, has also found time for several years' work abroad. Millions of workers in South Africa, Australia, Canada, the United States, China and the Soviet Union know him for his activities among them. Tom Mann is a true son of the British working class.

GEORGE DIMITROV

Dimitrov, General Secretary of the Communist International and indomitable fighter against fascism, is a true expression of the anti-fascist struggle of the world's oppressed millions. All over the world the masses of toilers -- workers, farmers, lower middle class -- are alarmed at the growing menace of fascism. They see this savage social monster spreading its tentacles over various countries, and they are stirred to action by the imminent danger it brings to their liberties, their living and cultural standards, and their very lives. In great People's Front movements they are organizing to beat back this threat and to lay the basis for a new order of society. And the leader of this popular world movement of the oppressed is the Communist International, at whose head, fittingly enough, stands the most famous of all fighters against fascism, George Dimitrov.

The Leipzig trial¹¹, at which Hitler tried in vain to fasten upon Dimitrov and the Communist Party his own criminal responsibility for the burning of the Reichstag building, was the most striking political trial of modern times. In it Dimitrov gave a brilliant demonstration of how revolutionaries brought before capitalist courts should defend their cause. Hitler expected to make of this trial a great field-day of red-baiting and to do to Dimitrov personally what has been done to Thaelmann¹² and thousands of other brave fighters.

But he caught a tartar in Dimitrov. The latter, by his intelligent and courageous stand, immediately put the whole fascist regime upon the defensive before the bar of world opinion. Dimitrov returned blow for blow against his persecutors. The threat of fascist torture could not intimidate him, nor the presence of the highest fascist officials as witnesses overawe him, nor the use of the worst discrimination against him in the court procedure silence him. Dimitrov's defense was so brilliant and daring that the whole world stood amazed, and the butcher Hitler was compelled to free this proletarian hero and thus practically to admit that his own tools had destroyed the Reichstag.

Dimitrov, a Bulgarian, is a lifelong revolutionist. His main field of work has been the Balkan countries, dangerous terror-ridden territory that tries the fiber of Communist militants. He has also worked long in the leading committees of the Communist International. All of us who have functioned in these committees knew him for a quiet, unassuming and capable revolutionary leader. But few, I daresay, suspected that within such a modest personality dwelt the lionhearted courage and superb fighting ability that Dimitrov demonstrated at Leipzig.

Dimitrov has had a long training in Marxism-Leninism. His principal theoretical and practical work as head of the Communist International was at that organization's 7th World Congress in 1935. This Congress outlined the policy of the People's Front as the means to defeat fascism and to lay the basis for an advance towards Socialism. Dimitrov's report and general theoretical work in the Congress were of outstanding quality and won the unstinted admiration of the big delegation of revolutionaries present from all over the world.

Dimitrov is the personification of all that is best in the world revolutionary movement. He is an inspiration to the oppressed in all countries.

MATTHEW WOLL

One of the most sinister and reactionary figures ever developed by the American trade union movement is Matthew Woll.¹³ Tied up with the National Civic Federation¹⁴ and other reactionary organizations, Woll, all his life, has been a bitter enemy of everything honest and progressive in the labor movement. He is, indeed, what Lenin called an agent of the capitalists in the ranks of the working class and a menace to the workers' welfare.

Woll was a great favorite of Gompers. When the latter, because of his advanced age, felt that his long term as president of the A.F. of L. was drawing to a close he, dictator-like, set about preparing a successor. His choice fell upon young Matthew Woll. Gompers systematically popularized Woll, helping him to become president of the Photo-Engravers Union and making him an A.F. of L. vice-president. The two became fast cronies and thought so much alike on economic and political questions that the young protege often wrote editorials under "the old man's" name. Woll was Gompers' star yes-man and he became known as "the Crown Prince".

Woll was apparently sailing straight to the A.F. of L. presidency when

there occurred a bitter internal fight over the Plumb Plan that upset his ambitions. The railroad unions, reflecting the war-time radicalism of the workers, had gone strong in support of Glenn Plumb's proposal for "government ownership and democratic operation" of the railroads. The sixteen associated railroad unions were officially on record for this plan and their next step was to try to win the support of the A.F. of L. itself. The matter came to a head in the A.F. of L.'s 1920 convention at Montreal, where the railroad unions presented the Plumb Plan, in substance if not actually by name, for endorsement.

Gompers, inveterate foe of everything even as remotely progressive as the pseudo-socialistic Plumb Plan, mobilized his forces for relentless war against it. He denounced the whole scheme violently and one after another of his war-horses took the floor to fight it. But the proposal had powerful support among the delegates. One strong leader after another spoke in favor of it. It was nip and tuck as to which side would win. And a victory for the Plumb Planners would not only mean a sharp turn in A.F. of L. policy, but might also cost Gompers his job as president.

In this crucial situation, Matthew Woll rose to speak. A hush fell over the convention. What would the "Crown Prince" say? Gompers, fighting a losing battle, smiled hopefully towards his much-cultivated protege. But lo, what an anti-climax to all his preparatory work! Hemming and hawing, Woll spoke on both sides of the question, being so evasive that when he sat down it was not clear to the delegates whether he was for or against the Plumb Plan. Evidently he was preparing to go with the current in the approaching vote. Exclamations of surprise were to be heard on all sides. Gompers, his face a study in disgust, turned the gavel over to a vice-president and left the platform. It was clear that his hand-picked candidate for the eventual A.F. of L. presidency was running away under fire.

When the vote came it turned out to be an avalanche for the Plumb Plan. Union after union, responding to the alphabetical roll call, voted against Gompers' time-honored policy. Old-time oppositionists danced along the aisles in unrestrained glee, and I surely shed no tears myself. One Socialist shouted to me: "For 30 years I have waited for this moment. Now we are finally going to rid the American workers of Gompers and his reactionary policies." Gompers, who sat in the chair pale and with bowed head shrank as from blows when one delegation after another, representing old stand-by unions, stood up and voted for "government ownership and democratic operation of the railroads."

Finally the roll call reached Matthew Woll's union, the Photo-Engravers, well down on the list. Already the die was cast. Manifestly, from the great vote it had already gotten, the Plumb Plan was easily victorious. Then Woll rose to vote his union. Everybody craned his neck to listen. In a thin voice Woll cast his delegation's vote against his friend, Gompers, and for the Plumb Plan. Many delegates groaned and several hissed.

As Woll sat down, I turned to Martin Ryan, a Plumb Plan leader and head of the union to which I belonged, the Railway Carmen, and asked: "How did you ever get that guy to vote for your proposition?" "Oh, Woll, we had to

him!" said Ryan, using a current sex expression more graphic than elegant. "He don't believe in government ownership any more than Gompers does. We simply forced the bastard into line.*"

The convention vote overwhelmingly supported the Plumb Plan. Never in the history of the Federation had Gompers suffered such a crushing defeat. It looked very much as though he would fail of re-election as President. But he did not, because the opposition, as much surprised as he was by their great majority, had failed to prepare a new candidate to take Gompers' place at the head of the A.F. of L. And one of the bitterest thoughts for Gompers was how his carefully nurtured protege, Woll, had so grossly betrayed him.

But the sequel transformed Gompers' seeming crushing defeat into one of the greatest victories of his career. For when the railroad companies saw that a really dangerous agitation was growing around the Plumb Plan, they put the screws on the reactionary railroad union leaders. Soon these lackeys began to weaken, and within a year after their great convention victory they had ingloriously thrown overboard the Plumb Plan and had fled backward to Gompers' position. They surrendered completely to the railroad companies and to him. As a result, Gompers' prestige was never so high. And great was the discomfiture of Woll who had thought that in joining up with the powerful opposition he was preempting a choice seat on the bandwagon. In reality, he had only succeeded in gravely weakening his own influence in leading circles.

Gompers died a couple of years later, in 1924, and when it came to choosing his successor, the machine top labor bureaucrats passed up the discredited "Crown Prince" Woll, and handed the rich plum of the presidency to William Green of the Miners. Other factors also contributed to the rejection of Woll, but not least important was his cowardly betrayal of Gompers in the Plumb Plan fight.

* Woll's cowardice and unprincipledness were on a par with his sudden resignation under fire from the Civic Federation at the 1934 A.F. of L. convention. John L. Lewis had introduced a resolution demanding that no A.F. of L. official should be a member of the strike-breaking, union-busting Civic Federation. It finally was adopted, but before it could pass, Woll rushed out to a telegraph office and wired in his resignation as vice-president of the Civic Federation.

EMMA GOLDMAN

The American Anarchist movement produced many good fighters. Such a one was Jay Fox. Born in New Jersey of Irish stock in 1870, Fox was a pupil of Albert R. Parsons and a veteran of the Haymarket days. He was a worker in many industries and occupied official positions in several trade unions (Blacksmiths, Machinists, Wood Workers, Timber Workers, etc.) A militant trade unionist all his life, Fox was especially active in carrying the Anarchist program into the labor organizations. Fox participated in the spectacular attempt in 1900 to free Alexander Berkman from the Western Penitentiary in Pittsburgh by tunneling into the prison. He was also arrested in the Anarchist raids following the assassination of President McKinley in 1901. And William J. Burns tried for years to establish a connection between Fox and the McNamara brothers¹⁵ in their militant campaigns. Fox was a pioneer in building the Syndicalist League of North America and, being an experienced and powerful labor journalist, he became editor of its central organ. This fine old hero of labor later became a member of the Communist Party.

There were many other revolutionary fighters in the American Anarchist movement, but I would not classify the much-publicized Emma Goldman as such. I was never an Anarchist myself; but as a Syndicalist I got to know the Anarchist movement well, and with it Emma Goldman. And I found her to be a shallow-pate and confusionist, an inveterate self-advertiser and publicity-hound and an insufferable bureaucrat and petty tyrant.

The last time I saw Goldman was in Moscow during the terrible hunger days of 1921. I was a delegate at the time to the Red International of Labor Unions' Congress and I received several Pressing invitations to visit her and Berkman. Although, being newly arrived, I did not know their actual opinions I suspected they were pretty shaky, so I resolved not to go alone. Earl Browder and I talked the matter over and we decided to visit them together to learn what they had to say. They lived on a side street, just off Tverskaya, not far from the Hotel Lux. Their apartment was located in the same building with an Anarchist club, and from their window floated a big black flag.

While Goldman prepared dinner, I talked with Berkman in the front room. He was full of complaints at the course of events in the Soviet Union and it was evident at once that he did not know what the revolution was all about. Actually he raised such elementary questions as the reason for the Soviet Government, the Red Army, and the prisons. Why did such things have to be? Did we not have enough of all that in Czarist days? Why not rely upon the spontaneous creative instincts of the masses? The Party, the State, the Army, the prisons should be abolished. It was clear to me that this Anarchist dreamer had neither the slightest idea of what were the gigantic tasks of the revolution nor of how to solve them. Had his naive ideas been put into practice the revolution would have collapsed in 48 hours and the country been overrun by counter-revolution.

After Berkman had regaled us for an hour or so with his unrealistic complaints and proposals, Emma Goldman called us into the dining room to eat.

Here we got a fresh shock. 1921 was a semi-starvation period and the people in Moscow (ourselves included) were living on the most meager rations, while in whole sections of the country actual famine conditions prevailed. Nevertheless, Goldman's table was covered with good food-- bread, butter, green vegetables, fish, preserves, etc. It was a layout such as I had not seen since coming to Soviet Russia. Noting our surprise that she and Berkman should eat so well while the masses were on the verge of starvation, Goldman told us that friends had sent the food from abroad, an explanation which neither of us believed, as we already had learned something of the devious methods by which various non-Communist elements lived. The petty-bourgeois Goldman could not face the personal rigors of the revolution any more than she could understand its problems.

Our discussion now turned around the recently suppressed counter-revolutionary revolt in Kronstadt. This uprising was one of the most difficult events in the entire revolutionary struggle. The capitalist world supported it and hoped it would succeed. While I was passing through London, Lloyd George said, in substance: "Kronstadt is the supreme test; if the Bolsheviks survive this we will have to sit down and talk business with Lenin." And so it turned out in reality. The Red Army smashed the revolt and not long afterward hostile capitalist governments were compelled, one after the other, to recognize the Soviet Government.

Goldman and Berkman, who were already far along their counter-revolutionary path of open opposition to the Soviets, denounced in unmeasured terms the suppression of the Kronstadt rebels, whom they supported. Goldman became especially violent in her denunciation. In reply we earnestly pointed out to these two enemies the counter-revolutionary significance of their making a united front with the capitalist world in support of the Kronstadt revolt against the Soviet Government. Then, without ceremony, we left. As we walked along the street homeward bound we kicked ourselves as fools for having wasted our time and energy in such a fruitless interview.

It was not long after this incident that Goldman and Berkman left Soviet Russia, avowed enemies of the Soviet Government. And the "Cheka",¹⁶ against which they have so bitterly inveighed as the destroyer of liberty, let them go in peace. Then began their persistent vilification of the Russian revolution in books, speeches and articles, all of which have been joyously reviewed and well paid for by the Hearsts and other arch-enemies of the working class. Goldman was a petty bourgeois political adventuress, never a revolutionist. Her contact with the great revolution in real life demonstrated that fact beyond all question.

PRESIDENT WILSON

Working in the revolutionary heart of the labor movement all my adult life, not unnaturally my chief contact with the government has been through policemen and judges. However, I have sat in conferences with a number of capitalist big-wig politicians, including various congressmen, senators and one cabinet officer, Secretary of War Baker.¹⁷ Also, I have met with one president, Woodrow Wilson.

The conference with President Wilson took place in early September, 1919, on the eve of the great steel strike of that year. The unions' committee had been denied a meeting by Judge Gary, head of U.S. Steel, and events were heading fast toward an open struggle. Over 30,000 steel workers were already on the street, discharged because of union membership; the right to hold meetings had been suppressed throughout most of the steel areas; the men had voted for a national general steel strike; and an acute tension prevailed generally.

In this critical situation we requested an interview with President Wilson in order to urge him to arrange a conference between the steel owners and the steel workers' unions. Our request for an interview with the president was granted, and in due time our committee, consisting of Samuel Gompers, John Fitzpatrick, Mike Tighe, Wm. Hannon, myself and one or two others, presented ourselves at the White House.

We were at once ushered into one of the palatial rooms and had hardly gotten seated when the president came in and shook hands all around. He was spry and apparently in good health, showing no signs as yet of the fatal breakdown that was soon to kill him.

Gompers, after a few banalities, opened up the discussion, making a weak and apologetic presentation of our case. He seemed to be overawed by the president. Gompers was followed by Fitzpatrick, who did much better, and then the discussion was on. It lasted for over an hour.

I was struck by the democratic manner of President Wilson. He immediately fell into a colloquial English that was surprising, coming as it did from a past president of Princeton University and the author of so many high-flown war-time speeches and statements. And to me his roughneck talk did not look a bit like pretense. Once, in the course of our discussion, the president excused himself stating with a smile that he had to go and "pump ship". We all laughed at this except Gompers, who probably felt that it was not precisely the proper expression for the head of the Great American Republic.

Wilson stated that he was fully in sympathy with our demand for a conference, but could not accede to our proposal that he call publicly upon Gary to meet with the union representatives. Making no bones about the matter, he said, "Gary would surely refuse, and then what would be the position of the government? It could not afford to be rebuffed thus openly."

This seemed to me to be quite a confession of weakness, assuming that the president favored our proposition. Gary, apparently, was not much afraid of action by the government, nor was Wilson anxious to come to grips with him and his powerful backers.

However, the president thought something might and could be done. He would approach Gary privately about the proposed conference. Pacing up and down the room, he began to speculate as to whom he might send as his emissary. Could we suggest anybody, he asked. Finally, he settled upon Bernard Baruch. He was the man; Baruch should go at once to Judge Gary and try to arrange things. Thus our session with the president ended.

We left the White House feeling that our mission had been a failure. Manifestly, Wilson was not going to do anything substantial in the matter himself, and we had no illusions about Baruch being able to change the open shop policy of the U.S. Steel Corporation through some dark-of-the-moon, backdoor negotiations. And so it turned out in fact; Gary sent the president's messenger, Baruch, about his business (if he ever went to him) and that was the end of the matter.

Then, a couple of weeks later, something interesting happened. President Wilson suddenly called upon our national steel committee by telegram and through the press to postpone the strike, which was set for September 22nd, until his scheduled national industrial conference should take place in October. This conference turned out to be a rabidly open shop affair and it would have been utterly futile for us to rely upon it for consideration. We foresaw this and refused to delay the strike. But the President's telegraphed demand for a postponement was highly demoralizing to our movement. Thus President Wilson, who refused to openly ask Judge Gary to sit down with his workers to put an end to the 12-hour day, 7-day week and the other inhuman conditions prevailing in the steel industry, did not hesitate to send us publicly an impossible demand that almost broke the steel workers' ranks. Nor did he seem to fear any loss of prestige through our refusal to meet him.



Steel Strike — 1919: Foster and Mother Jones.

MORE PAGES FROM A WORKER'S LIFE

II. Places

TABLE MOUNTAIN

Table Mountain, more than 3500 feet high, dominates the city of Capetown, South Africa. It is butte-like, with sides sloping steeply upward to its flat, table-shaped top. Almost daily clouds hang in the crest of the mountain and these are poetically known locally as "the table-cover". When the Pegasus sailed into Table Bay and I saw this impressive mountain I resolved at once to scale it.

Shortly after we got paid off in Capetown, I proceeded to organize my projected mountain climbing party. There were four of us in it, all young and wiry lads: Tim Harrison (American), Ole Hanson (Swede), Jack Manton (English) and myself. None of us had ever done any mountaineering, but this detail did not bother us appreciably. Life on shipboard had inured us to rough climbing and tall heights, so we were pretty sure we could handle any difficulties that Table Mountain might have to offer, judging it from a distance.

Now it would seem to be the part of wisdom, when planning a mountain climb, to inquire of the natives as to the best route to take. But we never bothered about that. The mountain, save for the apparently low cliff beneath its crest, looked dead easy; so the climbing strategy we worked out was nothing more complicated than a sort of frontal attack on the mountain. We would start from our lodgings near Adderly Street and keep on walking right up the face of the mountain until we came to the top. Just like that.

So, one morning bright and early we started out, our only climbing equipment being a firm determination and a few sandwiches apiece that our landlady had fixed up for us. Soon, with the looming mountain as our lodestone, we reached the edge of the city. Then, disregarding various no trespass signs, we crossed numerous farms and meadows, all sloping more and more steeply upward. Then came a long stretch of rocky land and big boulders, in scrambling across which we might easily have broken our legs or necks.

After this, things really began to get tough. The mountainside became very steep, almost precipitous, and our progress became more and more slow and difficult. Several times we had the greatest trouble climbing up cliffs. I began to wonder if we could reach the still distant crest. It seemed as though we could get stuck on the mountainside, unable to go either up or down. For the cliffs ahead of us looked quite unscalable and I knew for sure that we could not possibly go back the way we had come. Who had proposed such a stupid expedition, anyhow?

By this time the view had become magnificent. Beneath us lay Capetown, like a checkerboard. Off to the right was the famous Lion's Head, a 2000 foot mountain, which seen from the city, looks amazingly like a great lion, symbol of the British Empire. Before us stretched Table Bay and the South Atlantic. The leper island in the bay, invisible from the city, stood out sharp and clear. And away off on the left, 30 miles away, could be seen the Cape of Good Hope and the beginning of the Indian Ocean.

With increasing difficulty we went on and up. But our party finally came to grief when not more than 100 feet from the top, just when we thought our troubles were about over, three of us had climbed a particularly difficult cliff of about 25 feet. The other man, Manton, was also coming along when he lost his footing and fell with a scream to the ledge below. Luckily he did not go down the mountain-side altogether. I thought he had surely broken his back or neck, but he scrambled to his feet. He had broken a wrist.

Damn the luck anyway! Now what was to be done? Manton could not climb and we had no rope to haul him up. So Hanson stayed with him, while Harrison and I started off to get help. We climbed to the top and then we learned what fools we had been to take such a steep and dangerous route. For at the summit was a big pile of stones, and leading away from it, a well-marked and easy trail down the other side of the mountain.

We walked half way to town before we finally reached a place where we could telephone for a doctor. While awaiting his arrival, we scared up a long rope from a neighbor. In an hour or so the doctor came and the three of us made our way by the easy trail to the top of the mountain. It did not take us long to drag Manton over the bad spot and get him up on the flat mountain top. There the doctor set his wrist.

It was midnight when we finally got home, Harrison and I tired as dogs from our double-climbing of Table Mountain. Our shoes were worn out and our slim funds were depleted by the doctor's fee. As for myself, when I turned in to sleep it was with a firm resolution that when next I set out to climb any mountains I would at least have the foresight to inquire about the trail.

BERLIN 1910

In pre-war Berlin, where I spent six months in 1910, the Kaiser was personally very much in evidence. Most afternoons at about four o'clock he could be seen traversing Unter den Linden homeward bound to Potsdam after his day's "work" in his palace by the river Spree. The imperial automobiles were equipped with special bugle-like horns, forbidden to all other people, and they could be heard for several blocks. As the Kaiser came tearing along the famous avenue, his bugles blowing, all traffic stopped and crowds of people, doffing their hats, would run to the curbs to watch the autocrat pass.

At the place where Unter den Linden connects with the Tiergarten there is a traffic bottleneck which constituted a personal hazard for the Kaiser and which was always well guarded. At this point stands the great Brandenburg Gate, and the broad avenue narrows down so that its heavy traffic can stream through the five archways of the Gate. The two archways on either side were used for the traffic going in the opposing directions, but the middle archway was reserved for the passage of the imperial family alone. Sentries were always on guard to prevent the hoi polloi from using this sacred center portal.

As the Kaiser's car approached the great Gate it would come almost to a standstill before going through the middle archway. Altogether the daily situation— with the narrowed street and the nearly-stopped imperial car— could have been a tempting one for some terrorist who might want to send the Kaiser to Kingdom Come. The authorities were also apparently aware of the hazard because the place was ostentatiously guarded, especially around the time of the Kaiser's daily trips through it.

Indeed, the government took few chances with the Anarchists. All people known to be such were carefully watched constantly. A Syndicalist leader told me that there were then 200 known Anarchists in Germany and that each of these had attached to him three detectives who, working in eight hour shifts, kept close tab on him day and night. If a foreign Anarchist showed up in Germany he was deported, without trial, within an hour or two after being apprehended. A special section of the secret police had been organized with the sole task of carrying out this phase of the elaborate protective system built up around the Kaiser.

The Berlin of 1910 exhibited numerous signs of the militarism of the Kaiser. The streets in the middle of town were full of swaggering Prussian officers, and soldiers were on all sides. But one day especially I saw this system in full display. The occasion was a gala field day of the smart Berlin garrison troops. There were some 100,000 picked troops in the big pageant, which took place in the immense Tempelhof Field. The Kaiser was on hand in all his glory to review his much advertised troops. There were two or three hundred thousand spectators.

For the review the troops were lined up in two great rows. In the great, deep first line stood the infantry, solidly massed, one regiment beside the other. The second line was composed of massed cavalry and artillery.

The review proper consisted of the Kaiser and his glittering retinue of princes and top generals riding along in front of each great row of troops, and then of the 100,000 troops parading before the reviewing stand. It was an imposing spectacle, with the hordes of marching troops, the blaring of 60 military bands, the waving of thousands of banners, the gay throng of aristocrats.

The Kaiser himself was resplendent. Passing within 20 feet of where I was standing, he was mounted on a great black charger with gold and silver harness. His uniform was dazzling -- a glittering plumed helmet, a brilliant plush cloak loaded with medals, high patent leather boots, a golden bejeweled sword. But all his barbaric finery could not hide his badly withered right arm, which dangled by his side. In the Kaiser's entourage were scores of brilliantly clad, stiff-necked, fishy-eyed military officers who looked hardly human.

As I watched this great military pageant I wondered how long it would be before this destructive dog of war, like those of the other imperialist capitalist countries, would be unleashed. Nor was it more than a few years before all Europe was aflame. The very troops I watched that fine spring day at Templehof Field, the cream of the German Army, were among the first to be thrown into the slaughter. And the struggle was hardly ended when the gaudy Kaiser was in flight, his army destroyed and his dynasty ended by the revolutionary mass upheaval.

Now [1937] Hitler is rebuilding once more the great imperialist German war machine. He is sailing straight on to a still greater butchery, to a far more complete debacle than that of 1918, and the imperialists of other countries are steering the same course.

BUDAPEST

One bright morning in Berlin, in July 1911, I received a letter from Vincent St. John, Secretary of the I.W.W., instructing me to proceed to Budapest to attend the conference of the International Trade Union Secretariat, to be held August 10-12. I was to represent the I.W.W. and to demand that I be seated as American delegate instead of the reactionary Vice-President James Duncan, Civic Federationist, of the A. F. of L. St. John must have thought hoboing was pretty good in Europe, for he enclosed only \$10.00 to pay my fare and expenses, and a vague promise of more when I reached Budapest. But like a true I.W.W., nothing deterred by these slim finances, I put the \$5.00 I already had with St. John's \$10.00 and started for Budapest on the banks of the Danube some 600 miles away.

From Berlin to Nuremberg I went by rail fourth class, which was a sort of cattle-car passenger service about one degree better than beating your way by freight. It cost less than a cent a mile. Nuremberg, a great tourist center, is a quaint place, with its medieval buildings, walled fortifications, torture museum, castles, etc. From Nuremberg, I travelled by foot to Dresden, a distance of about 150 miles. It was a lovely hike through Bavaria and

Saxony. I was enormously interested in the hand-loom cottage weaving, the primitive farming and the lumber cutting, which seemed toy-like after the gigantic woods and logging operations I had been accustomed to in the Puget Sound country. In Dresden I spent a couple of days attending the German trade union congress.

Again fourth class I rode to Vienna and also from Vienna to Budapest. The International Conference was just about to begin when I arrived. My stake by now had dwindled to \$1.50, in spite of all my rigid economies. I had no funds with which to enjoy the beauty of the Hungarian capital.

I duly attended the conference. On the first day I had a big fight with the Social Democratic bureaucrats there, and was defeated, Duncan being seated as the American delegate. Suffice it here to state that with my fight I had made myself thoroughly disliked at the conference by the Socialist trade union leaders, who had a constitutional hatred for Syndicalists anyway.

At the end of the first day of the conference I was flat broke. No letter had arrived from St. John. I had nothing to eat on, nor could I buy the night's lodgings. To one with my experience as a hobo, however, this was not particularly alarming. I was pleased that I had at least carried out my mission in the conference. I would manage to live and travel home somehow. Thus philosophizing, I went to the outskirts of the town, looking for a likely place to sleep. Soon I found one. It was in a horse-drawn international moving van; that is, in a sort of tool box it carried underneath. Making a bed for myself among the miscellaneous collection of chains, rags, rollers, tools, etc., therein, I was soon fast asleep.

I had slept no longer than an hour, however, when the door to my tool box bed was flung open and a gendarme, searching for sleepers, rattled around in the darkness with his naked sword. He came within an ace of pinking me, so I lost no time in advising him of my presence. As he spoke only Hungarian, I could explain nothing. He took me to the police station.

There everybody looked on me much like a visitor from Mars. They found papers on me that identified me as a conference delegate. My story went that I was a delegate and had inexplicably lost my money. It must have sounded pretty fishy, for they put me in jail. And what a jail! It was full of drunks, and one insane man shrieked the whole night through. There was nowhere to sleep but on the floor. The place was full of cockroaches, lice and rats. So sleep was quite impossible for me.

Next morning I was visited by the jail doctor who talked to me alternately in French, German and English -- he seemed to think it was a good opportunity to brush up a bit on his languages. The doctor told me that I stood in serious danger of getting six months in jail for vagrancy, as they were very severe in Hungary against such crimes as mine. He also informed me that the conference had been notified of my difficulty. This news gave me a great pain when I thought of the big fight I had made there the day before, and how cynical Duncan and the others must be over my misadventure.

Finally, the head of the Hungarian trade unions, Jaizi, I believe his name was, came and talked me out of jail. I was placed in his custody. As we walked along the street I asked where he was taking me. The neighborhood looked familiar. "To the conference" said he. "I will put your case before the delegates and then maybe they will advance you a loan." "Nothing doing", said I, as the thought of asking any favors of that conference of trade union bureaucrats was too much for me. "I'll tell you what I'll do. If the Hungarian unions will lend me a few dollars, I'll pledge the I.W.W. to pay it back". This was a rather rash promise. But anyway Jaizi refused, saying he had no authority to make such a loan and insisting that I go to the conference. I was convinced by then that he wanted to humiliate me before the bureaucrat delegates.

So I turned on my heel and left him at a street corner, with him calling after me that I would surely be arrested and sent to jail. But I was quite resolved on that point. Better jail if need be than to ask that conference for help. So Jaizi went one way and I the other.

The situation looked tough enough. I was hungry and broke, and I suspected that Jaizi might inform the police that I had left his custody. But I still had an ace in the hole. I had two friends at the conference, Jouhaux and Yvetot, secretaries of the French General Confederation of Labor, Syndicalists like myself, who had voted for my being seated at the conference. So that noon I maneuvered around and met with them in the recess. They laughed at my predicament, said I had done right not to appear before the conference, fed me a good dinner and made me a loan of 50 francs (then \$10.00).

Now I was sitting pretty again. For a day or two I took in the sights of Budapest. Then the letter arrived from St. John, calling me back to the United States and, munificence unbounded, enclosing \$50.00 for the trip. The modest sum, however, proved ample and I repaid the French delegates, travelled fourth class to Hamburg, then steerage to New York (\$15.00) and finally beat my way to Chicago, arriving there with \$4.00 in pocket. It was 26 years later (Paris, April 1937) when I next met Jouhaux and we both laughed over Budapest.

CONSTANTINOPLE

In 1935-36, I made a trip from New York to Moscow and back, both ways via Odessa and Constantinople, or Istanbul as it is now called. It was on an American Export Line steamer and it carried my companion and me through the Mediterranean, Aegean, Marmosa and Black Seas, stopping at a dozen historic posts along the road.

Once inside the Mediterranean the route was packed with interesting sights: Italian and Greek prison islands; frowning Mount Athos, home of one of the most spectacular and famous monasteries in the world; the Dardanelles, at the mouth of which stands sinister Gallipoli, where 500,000 men died in the World War, its shores still strewn with the twisted wreckage of British warships; scores of beautiful Turkish and Greek Islands, the lovely Bosphorus, lined with modern palaces and round medieval castles; Smyrna (Turkey), colorful and dirty; Constanta (Rumania) for all the world like a South American city; Burgas (Bulgaria), matter-of-fact and poverty-stricken; historic Athens, where the King had just that week overthrown the Republic and seized the throne; Salonika (Greece), where several of Venizelos' ¹⁹ warships were in revolt and where we could not call on one trip because the harbor was strewn with floating mines; Odessa, lovely gateway to the new Socialist world.

It was the time of the Ethiopian war, just when Mussolini was calling the bluff of Great Britain, and we saw many signs of the sharp war tension. At Constantinople, the fleets of the Turks and Greeks, for centuries violent enemies, were holding joint maneuvers under command of a Greek; at Piraeus (port of Athens), several British torpedo boats and an Italian cruiser glared menacingly at each other; at Malta, evident preparations for war; at Gibraltar, under the shadow of the bristling guns of the great fortress, a tangle of British naval masts and stacks could be seen; all along the desert coast of French Morocco an occasional war blimp or airplane was visible and beyond the Straits of Gibraltar, in the Atlantic, one night we had a flotilla of Portuguese torpedo boats cross close before our bow.

Each trip we stopped at Constantinople for several days. The city is beautifully located, but its life is dull and drab. The city's three sections -- Pera, Scutari, Stamboul -- are separated from each other by arms of the Bosphorus and they differ widely in character. Pera, the hotel-tourist district, is modern, European and colorless. Scutari, which is located in Asia, is a typically sleepy Turkish town. Stamboul, the heart of old Constantinople, is the most interesting part of the city. There are located the great old-time palaces, the huge mosques, and the Grand Bazaar. There also are the hives of handicraft workers, working in surroundings as quaint as though they were still in the Middle Ages. Poverty, bitter and incredible, on all sides. Workers toiling across the Galata bridge and up the hill to Pera, carrying loads that would tire a horse. And nowhere in the whole city did I see a factory of any description.

War tension in Constantinople was so acute that it enveloped one like a blanket. Visa complications were great and all foreigners were the objects of careful scrutiny. Naturally, we two did not escape this observation,

having Russian visas in our passports. But the first tangible sign I noted of special attention was one day when I found that my baggage in the hotel room had been gone through in my absence. It was done skillfully, but some papers had been misplaced.

The next special attention we received was from a waiter in the restaurant where we ate regularly. For a few days he established a friendly contact with us and then, one noon, he suddenly burst forth with complaints of how bad conditions were in Turkey. He declared that everybody was becoming Communist and he complained especially of his trade union, saying he got no results from it, all the leaders did was collect his dues and live prosperously, etc. Now this sounded very familiar, but we listened non-committedly. And it was just as well that we did, because we learned next day from a friend who knew Constantinople like a native that the waiter's story was all a lie, there being no trade union of any kind under the existing dictatorship. The waiter was undoubtedly a police spy trying to draw us out. And it is not a healthy thing for travelling Communists to be too much "drawn out" in present-day Turkey, where Communism is outlawed.

We had another interesting experience along the same lines. My traveling companion had never been in Asia and he proposed that we take the ferry across to Scutari so that he might have that honor. We went down to the Galata bridge to take a boat, but I could not read a word of the many ferry schedules. Seeing a young army officer standing nearby, I decided to try my French on him, as I knew that all bourgeois elements in Turkey speak French. The officer replied with alacrity to my inquiry. He not only showed us the ferry to Scutari, but joined our party and went along with us.

Now this was a little more than I had bargained for. The young officer, very polite, plied us with a hundred questions: where did we live, what were we doing in Turkey, where were we going, etc. Half a dozen times he returned to the question of why we wanted to go to Scutari. My explanation about my friend's naive desire to put foot on Asian soil seemed very unconvincing to him. Still accompanied by our uninvited guest, we made our stay in Scutari very short and perfunctory indeed. Finally, feeling quite uncomfortable, we got back to Constantinople and parted from our polite but insistent guide.

Next day, upon relating the incident to my Constantinople friend, he told us that Scutari is militarily important and this probably accounted for the quizzing that we got. He also said that undoubtedly the whole business had been reported at once by the officer to police headquarters. But evidently they believed in the verity of my companion's desire to feel Asian soil beneath his feet. For we never heard further of the matter, which was quite all right with us.

THE SOUTH

The white workers of the South have long been especially exposed to anti-proletarian propaganda, living as they do in the midst of a ruthless capitalism saturated with vicious remnants of slavery times. From their earliest childhood they are deluged with patriotic jingoism, religious superstition and race prejudice in their most brutal forms. The South is the natural home of the Ku Klux Klan, the symbol of everything ignorant, bigoted, tyrannical and fascist in the United States.

Needless to say, the southern white workers have been much affected by the stream of reactionary poison that has been poured into their minds for so many years. Yet, these workers are strangely unspoiled by it all. In their struggles, especially when influenced by the Communist Party, they display a truly proletarian spirit that is both inspiring and amazing. When they revolt against the terrible economic and political conditions in the South, they seem to slough off as if by magic the reactionary propaganda with which they have been so saturated and they face the issue with an admirable class instinct, if not class consciousness. They have behind them a record of many of the hardest fought strikes in American labor history.

Time and again I have seen these workers, when in struggle, brush aside the vicious blanket of poison propaganda with which they are surrounded and develop a militant fighting policy. The bitter strike of the Kentucky miners in 1931, under the leadership of the National Miners Union, was typical. When the N.M.U. entered bloody Harlan County and began to organize the miners it was greeted with a wild K.K.K. campaign of red-baiting by press, pulpit and radio. The bosses and their tools denounced the N.M.U. organizers as "reds," "nigger-lovers" and "atheists," and appealed to the workers, almost all of whom were American-born from way back, intensely religious, afflicted with race prejudice, and almost completely unacquainted with the principles of Socialism.

But the workers were surprisingly immune to this vicious red-baiting, which was backed up with the usual campaign of sluggings, shootings, arrests, deportations, etc. The Kentucky miners, in deep revolt against their intolerable working and living conditions, were able to recognize the revolutionary National Miners Union as their leader and they rallied loyally around its standards in the face of the gravest opposition. They also accepted the Communist Party in the same spirit. One day, at a local conference, one of the miners in the cool and quiet way characteristic of southern workers, explained to me their position like this: "Now Comrade Foster, from what I have heard in this speaking (meeting) I don't reckon it is the exactly correct policy, but down in our country when a man joins the N.M.U. we also make him join the C.P." So responded the Kentucky miners to the Communists, notwithstanding the generations of cultivated ignorance and intolerance to which they had been systematically subjected by their economic masters.

The heart of the reaction in the South is, of course, the ruling class policy of suppressing the Negro people, and of driving a wedge between them and the white workers. The theory of "white supremacy" is the gospel of

every reactionary. The measure of progressiveness in the South is the extent of one's disagreement with this monstrous doctrine of intolerance and inequality. Every political question in the South turns around this central issue.

That the southern white workers have been deeply impregnated with the ever-present race prejudice even the most casual observer can see. Ordinarily they support the infamous Jim Crow system; and lynch mobs, unfortunately, have often contained in their ranks misguided proletarians and poor farmers. But the southern white workers, especially where they come in contact with the Communist Party, can also throw off the corroding race prejudice against the Negroes and develop a strong solidarity with them. Needless to say, the Negroes respond splendidly to this solidarity and display first class fighting qualities.

I have seen many examples of this, of whites and Negroes jointly striking together and joining the same unions; of white workers smashing Jim Crow prohibitions, and in one case protecting a Negro union organizer from a white lynch mob. One time in a textile workers' conference in Charlotte, N.C., during the heat of the great Communist-led Gastonia strike,²⁰ I saw an incident of this kind that warmed my heart. When the conference assembled its several hundred delegates, the Negroes, according to the Jim Crow custom, did not sit among the body of the white delegates but took their places in the gallery. But when we opened the conference we invited the Negroes to come downstairs and sit amongst the whites. This was against both law and custom in North Carolina, and I wondered how the whites would take it. But they responded splendidly. I remember one big worker, a well-known leader in the local K.K.K. and I saw a Negro take a seat right next to him. I expected trouble but, to my surprise, the Kluxer not only spoke in a friendly way to the Negro, but later on made an excellent speech for common union and strike action between the two races.

The southern white workers are by far the most religious section of the American working class, and their fundamentalist preachers sedulously cultivate among them hatred for the atheist Communists. Yet many times in struggle I have seen these religious workers, turning backs upon their pastor's warnings, freely accept Communist leadership. And it was curious to see them bring their religious terminology, church practices and revival spirit into the revolutionary unions of the Trade Union Unity League.

To suppress their downtrodden workers the Southern employers, together with their K.K.K. jingoism, race prejudice and superstition, also make use of ruthless violence. Ordinarily the always prevailing terror conditions are directed against the Negroes, but when the white workers dare to stir and to make demands the ruling class violence is immediately directed against them. But these workers, when aroused to action by their burning grievances, do not hesitate to defy this terrorism. They are not easily intimidated by company gunmen, police or troops, and know well how to defend themselves. When these militant workers go out on strike the employers literally prepare for war, and the long list of hard-fought southern strikes provides plenty of evidence that the casualties are not all on the workers' side.

In the great struggles that the coming years hold in store for the working class the southern white workers will surely play a vital role. The whole monstrous control system set up by the Southern capitalists-- the race prejudice, jingoism, superstition and outright terrorism-- will never hold them in check. In spite of all, they will achieve organization among themselves and unity with the great Negro masses and the toilers of both races will march in a solid phalanx against the system of exploitation in the South.



MORE PAGES FROM A WORKER'S LIFE

III. Incidents

POLICE WORK

During the Spokane 1909 free speech fight²¹ practically the whole local police force, for a period of several months, was concentrated in the middle of the city to fight the I.W.W. Consequently, the outlying sections were the easy prey of stickup men and burglars, who flocked to Spokane from all over the Pacific Coast for the soft pickings. This is the story of how one of these gunmen slipped through the fingers of the Spokane police.

At the particular time I was in the "state" cells of the city jail doing 60 days for free speech activities. My cell-mates were two I.W.W., "Blackie" and "Hell-Roaring-Sulphur-Smoke" Jones. The latter, a well-known soapboxer, was a remarkable character. He was possessed of a photographic memory. Among other astounding feats he could recite word for word Mills'²² big book, The Struggle for Existence. All one had to do was to call for a certain page and Jones, closing his eyes, would start reciting at the top of the page and go on to the bottom, word perfect. Time and again we checked him from the battered volume he always carried.

Blackie, Jones and I had been separated from the rest of the I.W.W. prisoners, about 75 in number, because we were charged with leading the organized jail activities. Our company in the "state" side was not many and not very choice. There was, for one, an oily forger who had been sentenced to 10 years in Walla Walla. Another type was "Frenchy," clearly a maniac, who had just brutally killed his partner. And finally, there was "Indian Joe," with his Oregon boot,* who was on the way from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, to Boise to do 50 years for murdering his wife.

One night another prisoner was brought in. He was an American of about 35. Strongly built, he looked like a prizefighter, and was clearly a tough one. Although charged only with vagrancy, he walked his cell endlessly the

* The Oregon boot is a substitute for handcuffs and other irons while transporting prisoners. It is a heavy iron boot-like arrangement, weighing 30-50 pounds, which is locked on the prisoner's leg. A prisoner wearing it must walk slowly and carefully. If he attempts to run it will throw him and probably break his leg as well.

whole first night. We had no need to be told that he had something serious on his mind, and in the morning it all came out.

It so happened that "Blackie," the I.W.W., and another prisoner were being released that day. The new prisoner-- whom we knew only as Jack-- heard of this and became highly excited. He was under the most urgent necessity of communicating at once with his partner on the outside, and he saw no other way to do so except through one of the prisoners being released. So, taking a long chance, he told "Blackie" his difficulty and his wants. "Blackie" refused to carry his message but the other released prisoner agreed to do so.

"Blackie" then told me Jack's story and the commission that he wanted carried out. Jack was one of the many crooks who had come to Spokane during the free speech fight. He was deeply troubled about a suitcase which he had sent by express to a town about 30 miles from the city. In it were jewelry, guns and miscellaneous items of plunder from about 20 holdups and burglaries-- in one of which he and his partner had shot it out with the police in a dramatic street battle, which the newspapers of a few days before had duly splurged. As a result of this last affair, Jack had concluded that the trail was getting a little too hot for him. Jack's partner left town and he himself decided to do as he had done often before in such circumstances, which was to let the express company guard the evidence and the swag until the storm blew over.

But this time he made a bad error. Previously when he shipped his suitcase out of town he had always torn up the express receipt at once, finding it an easy matter when he wanted his baggage back to secure it by a carefully planned system of identification. His mistake this time was that in leaving the express office he had put the receipt in his pocket instead of tearing it up. And he had not gone more than 100 yards when the police grabbed him on suspicion and held him on a charge of vagrancy.

This put Jack into plenty of trouble. The police had his express receipt and all they had to do was to go get his suitcase, containing enough evidence to tuck him away in Walla Walla pen for many years. The very suspense of the thing drove him almost frantic. He simply had to beat the police to that suitcase. But how? Jack was broke, and had no lawyer that he could trust with such a delicate task. Hence his urgent need for one of the released prisoners to notify his partner, a local bartender, and urge him to hurry and get the deadly suitcase by the usual method of identification before the police could get hold of it.

We did not know at the time whether or not the released prisoner carried Jack's message or if his partner got the suitcase. Nothing appeared to happen. Jack seemed to brighten up, however, as time went on and eventually, at the end of his 30-day vagrancy sentence, he was turned loose. We were astounded at his being released and could not understand how the police, with such damning evidence in hand, should let this dangerous crook go. We had also learned that Jack was wanted by the California police on a burglary charge.

A few months later, however, a bright light was thrown on the whole

incident of the release when, one day in Seattle, I ran into Jack's Spokane cellmate. "Say", said he, "do you know what happened to Jack and his famous suitcase? Well," he went on, "when Jack got out the police gave him his purse and other pocket effects, including the express receipt. They had made no effort to get the suitcase. So Jack rushed out to the small town where it had been sent a month ago and claimed it just as the railroad company had about decided to sell it for storage. His partner, finding it too hot, had never gone for it."

"But why," said I, "did the police let Jack go, with all that stuff on him?"

"Well," said my informant, "Jack happened to be one of the most notorious undercover men and scabherders of the nearby Coeur d'Alene mining district. So you can draw your own conclusions."

And I did. Of such material as Jack do the employers build their strike-breaking forces. And the police give the bosses full cooperation in their alliances with the criminal underworld.

ON LABOR SPIES

Bill Haywood²³ used to say that the soul of a labor spy was so small, 10,000 of them could dance on the point of a needle and never touch each other. Which just about expresses the workers' opinion of such rats. These traitorous elements, indispensable to the capitalists in their war against the workers, infest every kind of labor organization. Many have been exposed in the Socialist Party and the Communist Party-- for example, the chief prosecution witness in the big Communist trials in St. Joe, Michigan, 1923, was one Morrow, a Department of Justice undercover man. But it is the trade unions, conservative as well as revolutionary, that have always been most thickly sprinkled with spies-- I have seen large numbers of them exposed-- in fact as many as 26 at one blow in the Machinists' Union in Chicago. The explanation for the greater prevalence of spies in the labor unions of all kinds than in the workers' political parties is that the employers have sensed a keen immediate danger in the organizing campaigns and strikes of the unions and so have developed their huge spying system to defeat them.

From various sources come these stool-pigeons in the ranks of labor. Some work directly for individual employers; others are employed by such professional strike-breaking agencies as Thiel, Burns, Feltz-Baldwin, Pinkerton, Corporations' Auxiliary, etc.; still others, especially in the revolutionary organizations, are agents of the Department of Justice. The spies range in pay and activities from the unprincipled worker, who for the sake of a dollar a day extra or even merely to make sure of his job, snitches on his fellow workers, to the full time professional detective. It is incredible for how little employers can hire spies and also how many there are of them in industry.

The labor spies-- I speak principally of those in the trade unions-- appear under all kinds of ideological guises. Some make a great show of

radicalism, being the first to advocate extreme measures. Other spies appear as ultra-conservatives. Still others pretend to have no political views. And one that I knew in the Chicago stockyards, Przybilski by name, was an inveterate god-killer, never being content unless he was attacking religion, either in private conversation or from the platform, although great numbers of the workers were Polish and intensely religious.

Labor spies use many different methods. Often they follow a line of simply reporting to their masters what is taking place among the workers in the particular shop or organization. In other cases they are direct provocateurs, seeking to provoke the workers into untimely strikes or terroristic acts. Or, they may be professional perjurers, such as have railroaded many Communists, I.W.W.'s and militant trade unionists to jail. As a rule, labor spies distinguish themselves by being very active in the workers' organizations. I have met several who were most efficient organizers. Such activity is necessary for them so they can worm themselves into key positions that enable them to know what is going on and to mislead the workers.

Often the employers control trade unions through regular paid spies, who have managed to become elected officials. Indeed, the line between paid spies and ultra-reactionary officials (those corrupt racketeering elements who sell out strikes, graft upon employees, steal union funds, etc.) is so vague as to be often undistinguishable. Frequently employers have seized control of strikes through groups of their own detectives placed among the workers, especially in open shop industries and among unorganized workers. For example, in the 1913 I.W.W. rubber strike in Akron all but one of the leading strike committee were stool-pigeons. Many local organizations during the steel strike of 1919 were similarly spy-controlled and the Trade Union Unity League had like experiences in Lawrence and elsewhere.

The chief characteristic of labor spies is their lack of principle. For money or other advantage they will betray their employers or one another as readily as they sell out the workers. I have seen this happen many times. During the 1919 steel campaign, for example, we received many offers from spies who, for a consideration, would expose other undercover men. And once in the Soviet Union an expert investigator explained to me in great detail how spies were developed and organized under Czarism. One of the principal rules, it seems, was that no two spies working in a given organization knew each other as such. This was because if they did they would probably betray each other, either for money, jealousy, or to advance their own prestige in the organization in which they worked. A fine lot of vermin, indeed.

My Russian friend also described to me the complicated system by which the Czar's police used to go about developing spies in working class organizations. Often they would work for months on some weak or venal worker, gradually enmeshing him in spy work by threats, propaganda and, finally, money. The Czarist police, in their spy-building, had so many difficulties because of the revolutionary nature of the working class in general. Potential spy material was not plentiful among the workers and it was hard to develop. Similar conditions prevailed in other European countries. But American employers had considerably less difficulty. The working class here, less politically developed, less class conscious and more afflicted with capitalistic

illusions, furnished a more fertile recruiting ground for spies. Thus the detective agencies have been able to recruit many spies by such crude methods as advertisements in newspapers, more or less direct advances to unprincipled workers in the shops, etc. I have even known spy recruiters to approach trade union officials and revolutionary militants openly on first acquaintance, in saloons or even over the telephone with their filthy offers.

To uncover labor spies is often very difficult. In his memoirs, Kropotkin says he could detect them off-hand by their appearance and manner of acting. But this is nonsense. Many of them so cunningly cover up their tracks as practically to defy exposure. It is a fact that even so brilliant a leader as Lenin was deceived by several spies who worked their way up to key positions in the Russian Communist Party.

Although these rats are a menace, and must be relentlessly fought, care must be taken at the same time not to start spy scares in unions and thus to undermine the workers' confidence in the organization by unreasoning suspicion. The old Western Federation of Miners, in its militant fighting days, suffered much from this evil which they called "pink (Pinkerton) fever". The best preventive against spies is a vigilant watch over the policy of the organization and real care in the selection of leaders.

EXPERT TESTIMONY

The scene was the court-room at St. Joseph, Michigan, and I was on trial for participation in the secret Communist Party convention, held on a farm near Bridgman, Mich., in August, 1922.²⁴ Now, in order to convict me of the felony charge, unlawful assembly, it was necessary to produce substantial proof (besides the testimony of the inside stool-pigeon, Morrow, who attended the convention) that the police actually knew me to be present. This required considerable perjury, but of course, this was only a minor problem for the prosecution. American justice, especially when directed against Communists, is very efficient, and no one-hundred-percenter district attorney would ever permit a red-baiting case to fail for want of faked-up testimony.

Here is how a couple of "federal dicks", Spolansky and Hanrahan, drawing upon their elastic imaginations, established my presence at the convention. I quote their testimony only from memory, but the substance of it is correct.

Prosecutor: "Now, Mr. Spolansky, do you know of your own personal knowledge that the defendant, Foster, was present when the convention was being held?"

Spolansky: "Yes. I was hidden in a woods close by and from there I saw Foster standing at the pump near the farmhouse."

A little later detective Hanrahan took the stand and here is the way this bright representative of Uncle Sam testified:

Prosecutor: "Mr. Hanrahan how do you know that Foster was at the Communist convention?"

Hanrahan: "I saw Mr. Spolansky see him standing at the pump."

THE "CHISTKA"

The struggle toward a classless, socialist society in the U.S.S.R. had its repercussions within the Communist Party itself. These were reflections of the desperate battles of the displaced social classes for survival, economically and politically. Such reflections manifested themselves by the surreptitious entry into the Party of hostile elements pretending to be Communists, and also by the development of deviating inner-Party opposition groupings which, behind all their revolutionary phrases, actually represented the interests of the expiring landlord and capitalist classes.

The history of the Russian Communist Party, therefore, is full of struggle against anti-revolutionary groups and tendencies within its own ranks. By virtue of the huge revolutionary tasks it has to perform, the Communist Party must be an organization composed solely of clear-seeing, devoted, tireless and resolute fighters for Socialism. Within its structure there can be absolutely no place for waverers, sluggards, corrupt persons, and enemies of Socialism. So to free itself from such elements, who manage to seep in despite strict entrance requirements, the Soviet Party every several years carries out re-examination of its whole membership. These are called chistkas or Party cleansings.

One of my most interesting experiences in the U.S.S.R. was in attending such a chistka at a Party unit meeting one night at a big Moscow electrical manufacturing plant in 1929. On the platform of the meeting hall sat the examining committee, and the body of the hall was crowded with factory workers. Most of these workers were not Party members, for the rule in the chistka is that all workers, regardless of Party membership, may appear to bring such charges or complaints as they see fit and to express their opinion as to whether or not any given individual is fit to belong to the Party. This is one of the striking features of Soviet revolutionary democracy.

The routine of this meeting was simple. One by one, the Party members were called upon to speak before the gathering, to tell who they were, what they did during the revolution, when they joined the Party, and various other salient features of their life history. In cases where a worker's record was good and no exception was raised against him, he was at once passed. But if objection was made either from the floor or the committee he had to stand a grilling which he might or might not survive as a Party member. It was a long process. Sometimes the chistka would last several weeks in big Party units.

To listen to the workers recite their biographies was enormously interesting. Their life stories, covering the periods of Czarism, the two revolutions, the Civil War, the famine and the building of Socialism, were extremely colorful. For the most part the workers were well known to each other and they "got by" the chistka with nothing more serious than criticism for

minor shortcomings. One man, however, did not fare so easily. He was a foreman in the plant. This man made a good statement of his life activity, but when he concluded several workers arose and sharply attacked him from the floor. It seems that he was somewhat of a bureaucrat and the workers deeply resented his curt methods. He faced an uncomfortable hour of cutting criticism from the workers, but managed to retain his Party membership, although with a strict warning.

The most interesting case was that of a Hungarian worker. In broken Russian he told his story. He was a Party member of long standing and had fought through the Hungarian revolution. He painted a vivid picture of the ill-fated history of the Soviet government in Hungary at the close of the World War and the part he had played in it. It was a blazing story of revolutionary struggle.

I thought the passing of this worker would be a mere formality; but when he had finished his story, another Hungarian worker exile arose and began to question him in Russian. This worker, himself a veteran of the Hungarian revolution quizzed the speaker closely, and in only a few minutes he had involved him in hopeless contradictions. The speaker, who evidently had not expected this close checkup in far away U.S.S.R. stood in open confusion at the conclusion of his grilling from the floor. Everybody was astounded at the unlooked-for turn of events, although many had seen Russian impostors uncovered at such chistkas. The man's case was held for further investigation by the committee. I was interested to learn what came out of it all and some time later I found out that the Hungarian speaker had been finally exposed as a spy.

In 1937, as I write this, a broad cleansing movement is going on in the Party, the Soviets, the trade unions and other organizations in the U.S.S.R. The growth of institutions of all sorts has been so swift and gigantic and the need for executives to lead them so overwhelming that during the course of the last years considerable numbers of self-seekers, bureaucrats and incompetents, not unnaturally, have been able to worm themselves into responsible posts. They act as a brake upon progress. They are now being removed by the double process of democratic action at the bottom and executive decision at the top. Their elimination from key positions is making for a big increase in efficiency in every department of Soviet life.

THE SHARK-DOGFISH QUESTION

It was in Table Bay, Capetown. We were in the British bark Pegasus, which had just arrived after an exceptionally hard and long (six months) trip from Portland, Oregon around Cape Horn.²⁶ She was a hungry ship, furnishing the crew the notorious starvation British "whack" or official minimum rations. We were half famished, especially for fresh food. To make things worse, chances for fishing along the way had been bad for the past weeks.

So, hardly had we dropped anchor in the bay than Ned Lyndon put a fishing line over the side. Soon his efforts were rewarded by the capture of a fish about four feet long. At once a dispute began in the fo'c's'le as to what kind of a fish it might be. Some said it was a young shark; the rest declared it to be a full-grown dogfish. The argument waxed hot and heavy.

Nor was the question an academic one. It was a live issue. If the fish were a young shark, so the argument went, we hungry sailors could eat it; but if it were a dogfish (which is also a near relative of the shark), then it was inedible, maybe poisonous.

But it proved a knotty question which we could not decide. Amongst us were two English fishermen who should have been posted in such things, but they found themselves upon opposite sides of the question. Also the second mate, the sole officer on board, by his indecision on the question only confused matters further.

Here was a dilemma indeed. We were starved and we had a fine-looking fish. But dared we eat it? In this difficulty little "Cockney" Neal got a bright idea. "Let's throw up a shilling," said he, "and if it falls 'heads' it's a shark and if 'tails' it's a dogfish." Everybody agreed at once with this happy proposal. So we tossed the shilling. To our joy it came "heads". The piscatorial problem was solved. We ate the shark (?) a bit doubtfully. But nobody got sick or died. So, after all, we concluded, it must really have been a shark.

MORE PAGES FROM A WORKER'S LIFE

IV. Facts and Fancies

A GREAT LAWYER SETS US RIGHT

One day, shortly after the beginning of the big steel strike on September 22, 1919, W.H. Rubin, a well-known labor attorney of Washington D.C., appeared in Pittsburgh, with the blessing of Sam Gompers, and offered his legal services gratis to the steel workers. We accepted, of course, with pleasure, and at our ensuing national committee meeting I proposed that Mr. Rubin be retained as our chief attorney. But Mr. Rubin rose in the meeting and interposed an objection. He did not like the word "retain" as it carried the implication that he was to be paid. Then I re-formulated the wording to read that we engage Mr. Rubin's services, but he also objected to the "engage" for the same reason. He wanted it made perfectly clear in the minutes that his services were to be entirely unpaid.

Rubin got busy at once. He said we did not know how to conduct the fight to break through the legal terror then prevailing--the complete suppression of all union meetings, wholesale slugging and arrest of strikers, complete prohibition of picketing, etc. We had fought resolutely against this system for a whole year, but Rubin said we were all wrong. He would put on a big legal offensive and teach the lawless officials of Pennsylvania that after all, this was America. Meanwhile, friends of mine in the Pittsburgh Labor Temple informed me that Rubin had been boasting to the reactionary officials there that he had been sent into Pittsburgh by Gompers to take the strike leadership out of my hands.

Rubin began his "offensive," of which we were pretty skeptical. He issued several challenges and attacks against the city and state authorities, hired a couple of dozen lawyers to attend to the arrest cases and put a score of our organizers to help them. But the steel trust replied to all this with a counter-blast that shot it to pieces. The Sheriff of Allegheny County laughed at Rubin and hoped that he (and Fitzpatrick²⁷ and I) would get out of

Pittsburgh as soon as we got the several hundred thousand dollars we were taking from the steel workers. Then, those of Rubin's lawyers who did not quit immediately under pressure of bribes or threats, were ignored in the courts. Several were thrown out altogether and one or two arrested-- just for trying to represent strikers. The courts were unblushing parts of the great steel trust strike-breaking machine. Minor offenders were simply asked whether they would go to work in the mills, and if they agreed they were released. Strikers were sentenced out of hand after the most perfunctory trials.

All this flabbergasted Rubin. He was amazed at the whole situation. His enthusiasm for steel strike leadership obviously waned. All his fine-spun legalism collapsed in the face of the steel trust violence; for, as he put it, what can a lawyer do in a district that had no law. The man who shortly before had boasted that he alone knew how to make the fight and that, on Gompers' orders, he was going to take over the strike leadership, formally resigned and left for New York. Nor did we shed any tears at his going.

I thought we had thus seen the last of Rubin. But it so happened that shortly afterward I was kidnaped and run out of Johnstown by steel trust vigilantes. This caused quite a stir in the press and, lo, there came a telegram from Rubin offering to give me legal defense. Evidently his hunger for publicity had not abated despite his bad experiences in steel.

We talked over his proposal and decided to reject it. So I commissioned Jay G. Brown, our general organizer, to wire Rubin accordingly. Now Brown had worked with Rubin in his ill-fated legal offensive and he had gained no admiration for him. So he carried out my instructions pretty literally. His wire ran about like this: "Your proposal no good; Foster says you are fired."

This biting telegram badly ruffled the feathers of the nationally-known Mr. Rubin. He protested to me; he called up our chairman, Fitzpatrick, on the long-distance phone to Chicago; he complained to Gompers. But he stayed "fired."

That was the last I heard from Rubin in connection with steel until long after the strike had ended and our national committee was dissolved. A fund of more than \$100,000 was left over from the strike and the A.F. of L. office was in control of it. So up bobbed Mr. Rubin and put in a bill for \$100 for each day he had spent in Pittsburgh as our lawyer-- this from the man who had been triply insistent that I make it perfectly clear that he wanted no pay whatsoever for his services.

RAILROAD RULES AND RAILROAD PRACTICE

It is a characteristic of railroading that the Book of Rules is full of safety regulations that are never enforced. These rules look good on paper and they shield the companies from many lawsuits; but their application would cost money; so pity the workers who would try to put them into practice. A classical example had to do with the old-time link-and-pin coupler. According to the rule book, the switchmen and brakemen operating this murderous device were supposed to use a club instead of their hands. But this was a slow process and delayed the work, and a worker who used the rule book club would soon find himself out of work. So instead of the clubs the men used their bare hands to hook the links and pins together in the jamming cars, with the result that literally thousands of them had their hands crushed off. Such a wide gap is there between railroad rules and railroad practice that in Italy just prior to the World War the discontented railroad workers brought the entire railroad service practically to a standstill merely by rigidly applying the printed rules.

Once I had an interesting and dangerous experience with this contradiction between railroad theory and railroad fact. I was firing on the O. R. & N., between Portland and Umatilla, Oregon, in 1907. The locomotives on that system were just being converted from coal-burners into oil-burners. This was a welcome change for us, because, so heavy was the work of firing-- what with long trains, 10- to 40-hour runs, the poor coal which we called "real estate," and the bad repair of the engines-- that every fireman on our division had at one time or another been relieved on the road in such an exhausted condition that he was unable to proceed further.

In firing the new oil-burners the fireman had to synchronize skillfully the amount of oil fired with the amount of steam used. That is, as the engineer opened or closed his throttle the fireman had to simultaneously open or close his oil-feed valve. The fireman thus not only had to guard against the great belches of black smoke that came when he did not cut down his oil supply in time, but especially he had to watch that his fire was not sucked out altogether by the heavy exhaust of the locomotive, either through his failure to open his valve in time or by shutting it off too far when cutting down the supply of oil to be burned.

The latter contingency especially could very easily happen. The fireman, looking out of the cab window for switching signals and at the same time increasing or decreasing his oil feed as the engineer opened or closed his throttle, would often shut his valve too far, with the result that his fire, its oil supply cut off, would go out and several minutes delay would take place before it could be relighted and the work resumed. To prevent this happening the company furnished the fireman with metal stoppers which were screwed into the oil-feed valves in such a fashion that the valves could not be shut off entirely and the fire thus killed. But, with the characteristic contradiction between railroad theory and practice, the official rules forbade the use of such stoppers. This was because if by any chance the fire

got sucked out by the exhaust of the engines and the oil continued to flow into the fire-box (as it would if the metal stopper were on) then gases would generate and a serious explosion might result when the fire was relighted. Thus in the name of safety the rules prohibited the use of the oil-feed valve stoppers, and in the name of profits the company furnished the stoppers to the firemen.

One day I was firing an oil-burner which was in bad repair. Her flues leaked badly and so did the oil-feed valve, a dangerous combination of defects. So it was not strange that, cutting down my oil feed as the engineer shut off his throttle, my fire went out. In such cases the routine in relighting the fire was to remove the stopper and shut off the oil completely, then turn on the blower to drive any explosive gases out of the firebox, then throw in a bunch of lighted oily waste, and finally turn on the fuel oil; after which, ordinarily, the fire would light, and go on burning as before.

But this time it did not work that way. I duly shut off my oil-feed and turned on the blower; but when I threw the burning waste into the firebox a deafening explosion took place. It knocked me on my back across the gangway. When I scrambled to my feet and took account of myself I found that my face and hands were badly scorched. How I missed being blinded was a mystery to me. My eyelids were seared, but my eyes were unharmed. Evidently, quick though the explosion was, my eye-wink was even quicker.

The engineer and I figured out the cause of the explosion, as I, my face and hands smeared with the molasses-like cylinder oil, was being hurried to the nearest doctor, in a town 10 miles away. Clearly at fault was the leaking oil-feed valve which, because I did not shut off the supply of fuel oil, had resulted in filling the firebox with gas that exploded as soon as I threw in the lighted oily-waste. The bad repair of the engine was to blame, not I.

But now the famous contradiction between railroad rules and practice entered into the picture. When a few days later I duly appeared before the Master Mechanic to explain matters to him he promptly absolved the company from all responsibility and blamed me for the accident. He actually had the crust to tell me that it happened because I was using a stopper on my oil-feed valve, which thus had caused oil to flow into the firebox while the fire was out and created the gas that exploded. I denied this manifestly false analysis of the accident, and I also informed him that the metal stoppers, the use of which he condemned so roundly, were made by the company itself and furnished to the firemen who were practically compelled to use them. Upon my saying this he became very angry and threatened to discharge me for my "insolence." And it was only by the vigorous intervention of the union grievance man that I saved my job and forced the company to pay me for the time I was laid up by the accident.

ON GETTING ELECTED

Reactionaries in the trade union movement have learned during their long years of leadership many tricks of control that help mightily in maintaining them in power. They know fore and aft the trick clauses of their union constitutions; they are skilled in parliamentary maneuvering and they have much thumb-hand knowledge of mass psychology. In their union national conventions especially they make use of all these stratagems to great effect -- they employ the dodge of the previous question to stifle discussion; they dilly-dally with the convention's business until the last day and then rush through a lot of important matters post-haste virtually without discussion; they speed adoption of vital matters in the opening minutes of the session before the delegates have arrived; they win weaker delegates by flattery, lavish entertainment and high per-diem rates, etc., etc., not to speak of more shady practices.

Revolutionary and progressive trade unionists, with their eyes focussed solely on the merits of their proposals, have usually scorned to learn these devices, even to the extent of being able to guard themselves against trickery. Consequently, on numerous occasions they have lost good causes simply through being outmaneuvered by the reactionaries, although the majority was favorable to them.

Once in my trade union experience I, myself, used what my opponents called a bit of sharp practice, but which I considered just a piece of good parliamentary strategy. In any event I always figured that in this instance the end fully justified the means!

It was at the outset of the big 1918-20 steel campaign. I had introduced, shortly before, a resolution in the Chicago Federation of Labor, which had been adopted, calling upon the A.F. of L. to launch a great organizing drive in steel. It was essential that I should go to the approaching A.F. of L. convention as the delegate of the Chicago Federation of Labor in order to fight for the steel resolution. But this was easier said than done. Although Fitzpatrick and Nockels were elected President and Secretary of the Chicago Federation of Labor year after year in routine fashion, the job of A.F. of L. delegate, which was generally looked upon as a fine two weeks' vacation, was always hotly contested.

On the occasion in question there were several prospective candidates, all powerful local trade union leaders. I was secretary of the Stockyards Labor Council (55,000 members) and had a great deal of prestige for having led the national packinghouse drive that had recently organized 200,000 workers; but I was not sure that I could win the delegates in the face of such a strong field. So I decided on securing it by stratagem.

My strategy was that I would keep my candidacy a secret and then spring it suddenly at the election meeting. By this means I might make the steel

campaign the main issue of the delegateship and thus prevent the nomination of some or all of my opponents. The key to the plan was to get my name in nomination first; so that when the question of steel was raised the other contenders, who had nothing to offer on this matter, would be afraid to accept nomination. I felt sure, however, that if I were not nominated first, the others who might be named ahead of me would not resign. So I organized matters according to this theory.

In those days the Chicago Federation of Labor was the most progressive central labor union in the country, and my nominator's speech went over big with the delegates. They applauded long and loudly and several demanded that nominations be closed. But Fitzpatrick called for further nominations, and nobody responded. Evidently the bureaucrats, with the two weeks' vacation idea of the delegate's job, did not care to take the very serious chances of defeat. Instead, one of these prospective candidates arose and proposed that my nomination be made unanimous, which was done. And so I went to the St. Paul A.F. of L. convention in June, 1918, and there the historic steel drive, precursor of the C.I.O. 1937 drive, was launched. Old-timers in the Chicago Federation of Labor told me later that I was the first delegate in their memory ever to be elected unanimously as delegate from that body to the A.F. of L.

DECENTRALIZATION

Workingclass organization may suffer from two basic defects: it may be so highly centralized that the whole control of the movement is concentrated at the top and the rank and file have little or no say in the running of things; or, in the other extreme, it may be so decentralized that the organization is rendered powerless by an excess of "democracy". It has remained for Communists to develop an organizational system, democratic centralism (its great theoretician was Lenin), that at once combines a strong centralization with a broad democratic control.

In the generally highly organized life of the United States we are accustomed to seeing examples of the first defect of mass organizations -- overcentralization -- as for instance in trade unions where the officials rule as uncontrolled autocrats. But we have also had one striking example, the syndicalistic Industrial Workers of the World, of the anarchistic ultra-decentralization tendency.

The I.W.W., because of special conditions needless to detail here, made a fetish of decentralization. It habitually denied its officials sufficient power, funds and tenure of office to develop the organization's potential strength. For example, the absurd spectacle was to be seen of delegates at the interminable national I.W.W. conventions discussing in full session such minor routine administration matters as whether or not the price of an outdated pamphlet should be reduced and if so, how much. Let a simple incident, taken from the life of the I.W.W. of Spokane, Washington, of which I was a member, serve to illustrate the paralyzing effects of the naive and infantile decentralization tendency.

One day in the local I.W.W. office, I remarked to the secretary, C.L. Tiligno:

"Why do you keep your books all scattered about? Why not get a piece of lumber and build yourself a shelf for them?"

"Fine," said he, "but I have to secure authorization from the city committee to do it. I'll take it up at the coming meeting."

Which he did. This meant a 10 days' delay, as it was that long before the committee next met. Now the committee was composed of eight delegates, two apiece from the four Spokane locals. When the shelf matter was placed before this body, the delegates, in all good decentralization, must needs refer it for decision to their respective local unions and it was so ordered.

Two weeks later the city committee met again, but the shelf issue could not be settled. It seems that two of the locals had failed to vote on the matter, so it all had to be held in abeyance for the meeting two weeks hence. When that meeting also finally rolled around something else intervened to prevent action. And thus two months passed away.

One morning, however, when I came into the office, there was the shelf all in order, a three foot piece of white pine with a couple of ten cent iron brackets holding it up, and the books all strung along it as books are wont to string. "Good", said I to Tiligno, "so at last you got action out of the city committee?"

"Oh, no," he replied, "at the last meeting two of the locals came in with a new proposal that we get a second-hand bookcase, and that tied everything up again. So next day I put up the shelf myself."

THE LIQUIDATION OF SUPERSTITION

When I first arrived in Moscow 16 years ago [1921] it was on a Saturday night. The next morning I was awakened early by the ringing of Moscow's famous bells. I never had heard anything like it. Moscow had "40 times 40" churches; each was equipped with a big chime of bells, and it seemed as though they were all clanging at once, thousands of them. They were of all sizes and tones; the small ones were beating a rapid clatter, while the great ones boomed along in solemn measured tempo. The whole city throbbed with the tremendous ringing, which lasted for several hours.

This was nearly four years after the revolution and evidently religion was still strong in Moscow. And indeed, it did not require the Sunday bells to show this. Nearly all the churches were in operation, and well patronized. A hundred times a day one could see people crossing themselves and bowing in the streets before some favorite ikon in the elaborate Russian manner. Be-whiskered, long-robed Orthodox priests could be seen on every block. And daily one encountered great religious processions; that is, masses of people carrying bejeweled ikons and marching along formlessly, singing as they went.

But such religious scenes in the Russian capital are now gone, never to return. No more do Moscow's bells break the still morning air with their thousand-tongued clamor. No longer do the primitive mass religious processions march the streets, and not for several years have I seen anyone bowing and praying before a public ikon. Seldom does one now see a priest on Moscow's streets. Though a few of the churches remain open, they are patronized chiefly with but a sprinkling of old folks. Many of the other churches have been converted to other purposes.

This is revolutionary Moscow and the picture is about the same in every other Russian city. In the villages the anti-religion tendency is also evident, but the tempo of religion's decline is slower. This is because the peasants were much more deeply saturated with religious superstition than the city dwellers and, besides, it is only in the last few years, under the collective farm movement, that they have been drawn deeply into the broad current of Socialist reconstruction.

During the 16-year period of which I speak the priests and worshippers grew fewer and fewer. The religious processions shrank in size, became more confined to older people, occurred more rarely and finally died out altogether. I can imagine that an old-time ikon procession would create a sensation in the present-day "Besboshnik" Moscow.

The right to religious belief and worship has always been recognized in the Soviet Union, and it is specifically guaranteed in the new [1936] U.S.S.R. Constitution. There has never been any compulsion used against the Orthodox church, although the latter, in the Czarist days, was the willing ally of the exploiting classes and had blessed every torture and exploitation visited upon the Russian people through the centuries by their Czarist oppressors.

Religion has no basis in an enlightened Socialist society. Free workers face the real facts of material existence calmly and need no fairy tale of a heaven hereafter to sustain them.

The gigantic task of mass enlightenment goes on on many fronts -- a tremendous spread of general youth education, the elimination of adult illiteracy, the political education of the whole people and the wide dissemination of general scientific knowledge. Before this advancing wave of enlightenment, religious superstition inevitably retreats.

THE BOILERMAKER'S WISH

When I was a kid, I worked for awhile with an old "Pennsylvania Dutch" boilermaker, as I planned to learn that noisy trade. One day, as we were working together and he had been hammering away for hours without a stop, I said to him: "Sam, I wish I had a dollar for every time you have struck a blow with a hammer in the 40 years you have spent at the trade."

Old Sam, who was a Socialist and never failed to seize a chance to make propaganda, temporarily suspended his everlasting hammering and looked at me quizzically. "Yes, my boy," he agreed, "that would indeed be a lot of money. But if you are going to express such covetous wishes why not make one in the true spirit of capitalist greed. Let me give you a real capitalistic wish. I wish", he went on, "that I had the Great Eastern (the largest steamer of its time) loaded full with needles that were worn down to the eyes sewing up my money bags."

Sam's was indeed an all-comprehending wish, a sort of beau ideal of the capitalist grabber of everything in sight. The magnitude of Sam's wealth, were his wish to come true, staggered my youthful imagination. I tried to figure out how many thousands of money bags one needle could sew up before it would show even the slightest sign of wear, much less wear down to the eye, and then to estimate the incredible number of such needle eyes, each of which would weigh practically nothing, it would take to make a 20,000-ton cargo of the Great Eastern. But I had to give it all up as the calculation required astronomical figures far beyond my conceptions. I figured that even a typically greedy capitalist would be satisfied with such an amount of gold, but old Sam doubted it. At any rate, I had to yield the wishing palm to the old boilermaker, who had long since resumed his eternal hammering.

SWANSON'S DREAM

Ole Swanson was a husky Swedish immigrant, one of those millions of toilers who poured past the Statue of Liberty into New York, their hearts beating high and their eyes shining with the wonder of the new world and its promise. Swanson eventually found himself in the great timber country of the Pacific Northwest and it was then that I met and worked with him as a logger. His mind was set on becoming well-to-do. He would break with the poverty that had been his family's lot for generations. He would realize in full the promise of America. To this end he worked and skimped and saved; he denied himself rest, recreation, education and even proper food and clothing.

Swanson's dream of prosperity began to come true. He finally got together a few hundred dollars and, some twenty years ago, he went into the cutoff timberland not far from Astoria, Oregon, and bought cheaply about twenty acres of logged-off land. Here he would carve himself a comfortable home out of the

stump land. It was a very difficult prospect as the land would cost at least \$200 per acre to clear and living conditions were hard. But, nothing daunted, Swanson plunged into his task.

The next years were full of heavy labor for Ole. Gradually, however, he cleared his place. In the neighboring camps, saw mills, and fishing fleets, he occasionally earned a few dollars to help him get by. Slowly he built a home. Then, like many others in the neighborhood, he branched into the chicken business. Now he really began to prosper. Times were good, prices for eggs were high and the other factors were favorable. Soon the number of his hens ran into the thousands. Money flowed to Ole in a goodly stream. And as Ole prospered he cast off his allegiance to the Socialism which he had learned as a worker in Sweden; for manifestly such radicalism was not needed in this great land of opportunity.

Meanwhile, with his own hands and the labor of his wife and growing boys, Swanson kept on improving his chicken ranch. He bought 40 acres more land, several cows and his flock of chickens prospered. He built a beautiful bungalow, eventually equipping it with electricity and sanitary plumbing -- doing it all with the hands of himself and family as he was an excellent jack-of-all-trades. In front of his home, with infinite labor, he constructed a large and beautiful lawn with gorgeous flower beds, a spouting fountain, and a swell-stocked fishpond. His chicken houses, barn and other farm buildings, always freshly painted, were the last word in neatness, cleanliness and efficiency; his little orchard and garden were gems of their kind. His big new automobile shone slick and bright.

Altogether, Swanson's place was beautiful. It stood out in the midst of the many slatternly nearby ranches of the impoverished stump farmers. Automobile parties going along the road and suddenly coming upon it in the unlovely logged off country would stop to admire the place, the product of this efficient and tireless toiler. It seemed that Swanson's dream had indeed come true. He had wrested from the dense wilderness a home that gladdened the heart of himself, his wife and his growing boys. He had money in the bank; he would send his children to college to get such an education as he had never had. And in creating all this prosperity, Swanson had displayed qualities of diligence, energy and intelligence which would have carried him very far if applied in a more fruitful field of operation.

Then came the great crisis of 1929. Its effects upon western chicken ranching, as upon agriculture generally, were devastating. The prices of eggs and chickens collapsed, but chicken feed, taxes and other expenses remained near their old levels, and some even increased. Swanson, like other chicken raisers, soon learned that his hens had suddenly been transformed from a gold-giving asset into a heavy liability. Gradually they "ate their heads off." Ole hung on desperately, hoping that times would get better. He spent his bank account, he mortgaged his place; but prosperity did not return. He had to get rid of all but a few of his hens, and at panic prices; he also sold his cows one by one, and his shiny auto.

What, then, to do for a living, with his once so reliable hens gone? Taxes and other debts continued to pile up. With the camps, mills and other

industries of the vicinity practically closed down, even an occasional day's work was almost impossible to get. Nor could his boys find work, and they all hung around the place more or less demoralized. To sell the produce of his garden was also impossible; indeed, it could hardly be given away. He even tried in vain for county relief. Whichever way he turned, he was up against an economic stone wall.

Swanson, like millions of other small farmers, was economically ruined. His enticing dream of creating a lovely home and comfortable livelihood for himself and his family was hopelessly shattered. It had turned into the nightmare that faces so many small farmers: that one day they will be compelled to walk off their places and join the unemployed in the city. He was one of the many millions of workers, small farmers and small middle class elements who had their living standards slashed, their savings dissipated, their hopes ruined in the great economic holocaust.

I learned his story from Ole in the fall of 1932. Remembering me from our old days as workers together, he showed up at the Portland meeting where I was speaking as Presidential candidate of the Communist Party. He told me all his troubles. He felt that he had practically wasted his life in struggling to build the place that had so ruthlessly been taken away from him. But he took consolation in the fact that if he had lost his property he had likewise gotten rid of his capitalist illusions at the same time. He had learned that the Socialism he had absorbed in the old country was valid not only for Sweden but also for the United States. Ole's petty bourgeois dream of capitalist prosperity was gone, even as in the case of many millions of other cheated and robbed producers, never to return. He and eventually they, in their search for prosperity, will turn their eyes in a new direction, towards Socialism, and their new hope will not fail them.

MORE PAGES FROM A WORKER'S LIFE

NOTES

Introduction

1. William Z. Foster, Pages from a Worker's Life (International Publishers, 1939), pp. 282-283.

2. Ibid., p. 284.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., pp. 194-195.

5. The five items not included in Pages from a Worker's Life but subsequently republished in World Magazine (weekly supplement to Daily World and People's World) are as follows, with dates of appearance in Daily World:

Unemployment (9-28-74)

Jeff Joins the Party (10-12-74)

The Butte Miner's Split (12-14-74)

Ultra-leftism and Right Opportunism (3-8-75)

Prisoners (5-3-75)

Text

6. Thomas J. (Tom) Mooney was convicted on perjured testimony of being implicated in a San Francisco bombing outrage in 1916. His death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment and, after a generation-long struggle, he was released in 1939, having been pardoned by Gov. Culbert L. Olsen of California. Mooney died in 1941.

7. Lucy Parsons was still alive when this was written (and Tom Mooney still in prison). Mrs. Parsons joined the Communist Party in 1939. She was 89 years old when she died in a fire which destroyed her home in 1942.
8. Mrs. Fannie Sellins, an organizer for the United Mine Workers of America, assisted in the organization of steel workers during the Great Steel Strike of 1919. She was killed by company gunmen at West Natrona, Pa., on August 26, 1919.
9. "Mother" Ella Reeve Bloor remained active until her death in 1951 at age 89.
10. Tom Mann, born 1856, died in 1941, aged 85. Before becoming a Communist he had been, like Foster, a syndicalist.
11. George Dimitrov (1882-1949) was General Secretary of the Comintern (the Third, or Communist, International) from 1934 until it was dissolved in 1943, during-- and because of-- the Second World War. The Leipzig trial was in 1933.
12. Ernst Thaelmann, the General Secretary of the German Communist Party, was imprisoned by the Nazis in 1933. He was murdered by the Nazis in 1944.
13. Matthew Woll (1880 - 1956)
14. The National Civic Federation was an employer dominated organization in which the AFL participated in a fraudulent quest for labor-management "harmony." It lasted from 1900 to the mid-thirties.
15. J. B. McNamara and J. J. McNamara were convicted of participating in the bombing of the Los Angeles Times building in 1911. J. B. died in prison after serving 29 years. He had joined the Communist Party several years before his death. William J. Burns headed a notorious private detective agency.

16. The political police.
17. Newton Diehl Baker (1871-1937) was appointed by President Wilson in 1916.
18. See note 14.
19. Eleutherios Venizelos, former Greek premier, opposing the monarchy, had joined in an armed uprising in 1935.
20. A hard-fought strike against the Loray mill of the Manville-Jenckes Co. was conducted by the National Textile Workers Union at Gastonia, N.C., starting on April 2, 1929.
21. Spokane: The struggle to win the use of the streets for meetings by the Industrial Workers of the World lasted from November 1909 to June 1910. More than 1200 persons were arrested; Foster and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn among them. (Flynn, married at that time to IWW organizer Jack A. Jones, was 19 years old and pregnant.)
22. William Thomas Mills, The Struggle for Existence (Berkeley: International School of Social Economy, 1904).
23. William D. (Big Bill) Haywood (1869-1928) was a leader of the Western Federation of Miners, a founder and outstanding leader of the Industrial Workers of the World and, from 1920 until his death, a member of the Communist Party.
24. The trial ended on April 5, 1923 when the jury disagreed. The case was dismissed some ten years later.
25. Popular name for the Model T Ford.
26. Sailing in square-rigged vessels, between 1901 and 1904 Foster covered 50,000 miles and qualified as an able seaman. See also "Table Mountain" in Chapter II.
27. John Fitzpatrick was chairman of the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers besides being president of the Chicago Federation of Labor.

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